Gems of Appalachia: Enhancing Appalachia's Gateways to the Blue Ridge Parkway

Overview

The Appalachian Regional Commission, in partnership with the states of North Carolina and Virginia, has developed a grants competition for communities that are entry points to one of Appalachia's most cherished assets: the Blue Ridge Parkway. The *Gems of Appalachia Initiative* will provide funding to gateway communities to enhance the economic development opportunities of the Blue Ridge Parkway's 75th anniversary celebration and to strengthen the connections between the Parkway and the surrounding towns and cities.

This project is targeted to support Blue Ridge Parkway communities located within the ARC region in their efforts to connect to the anniversary events, collaborate with neighboring communities, enhance and extend the visitor experience, brand a regional identity while maintaining the unique character and cultural heritage of the local communities, encourage recreational and environmental tourism opportunities, and establish a strong foundation for a long-term partnership with the Parkway and the National Park Service.

A total of $150,000 in grant funds will be available through the *Gems of Appalachia* competition. The initiative is part of ARC's overall effort to promote asset-based economic development.

Who is Eligible?

This program is targeted towards gateway communities – defined as towns and counties that are adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, and located within the ARC region. Nonprofit organizations, governmental entities and public educational institutions located in a gateway town or county are eligible to apply. For-profit organizations are not eligible for this program. (See pages 6-7 for map and list of the eligible ARC counties and cities.)

What is Eligible?

Communities can request funding to implement a specific project or activity that supports natural or cultural heritage tourism, community planning, asset building, recreational development or other activity that enhance the area's unique identity as a gateway to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Examples of an eligible project or activity for a *Gems of Appalachia* gateway grant include:
- Create guided thematic tour (biking, hiking, equestrian, birding) experiences that wind through several gateway communities and explore the area's recreational assets; partner with local outfitters to coordinate logistics.
- Coordinate with local food community to showcase farmers' markets and local growers at community fairs and Parkway anniversary events; provide education and training to expand sustainability of small-scale farmers.
- Provide technical assistance to downtown merchants to enhance economic viability of Main Street and attract more visitors.
- Enhance an existing web site with downloadable video and audio tours of popular attractions, new Parkway-related podcasts, GPS itineraries, or cell phone applications.
- Convene a multi-community planning workshop to develop a 12-month, sustainable tourism action plan.
- Implement sustainable strategies to stimulate enhanced economic development of forestry, furniture, agricultural products, fisheries, and kitchen incubators located in gateway communities.

Grants cannot be used to support marketing or promotional activities, such as brochures that target single-site destinations or magazine advertisements. In addition, grants cannot be used to fund construction projects.

Grant Guidelines
- Grant requests can range from $15,000 - $30,000. Applications that involve partnerships of two or more counties can request up to $40,000.
- Applicants with proposals related to new technologies are encouraged to seek partners to expand the scope and impact of their projects to meet the grant threshold. To support unique opportunities, ARC will consider applications below the $15,000 limit for new technology-related projects.
- Grants must be matched 80/20 by the local community. Cash or in-kind match is allowable.
- Match cannot be "backdated." Any in-kind activities or local expenditures incurred prior to a contract signed by ARC cannot be counted as eligible match. In addition, any activities or expenses incurred prior to a contract signed by ARC cannot be reimbursed.
- Nonprofit organizations, governmental entities and public educational institutions located in or near a Blue Ridge Parkway gateway community are eligible to apply (see pages 6-7 for map and list of the eligible ARC counties and cities). For-profit organizations cannot apply for a grant, but can be part of a project partnership with an eligible applicant.
- Deadline for grant applications is Friday, June 26th, 2009.

Selection Criteria

A review panel will evaluate submissions and forward recommendations to ARC for final approval. Applications will be evaluated on several criteria, including:

1) Potential regional impact of the proposed project/activity.
2) Long-term value of the project outcomes.
3) Capability of applicant to successfully implement the project.
4) Level of community support.
5) Feasibility of project budget.

In addition, ARC encourages applicants to consider the following items:

Partnerships - Engaging public and private partners is often critical to the success of local development activities. To increase the likelihood of success and sustainability, ARC encourages gateway communities to involve public, private, and institutional partners in the development and implementation of a gateway community project.

Community Leadership - ARC encourages applicants to clearly identify the involvement of existing local leadership in their proposals. Local leaders and emerging civic entrepreneurs are critical assets for developing—and redeveloping—the promise of the region.

Project Sustainability – Sustainable tourism respects a community's character and its natural resources while providing a satisfied travel experience for visitors. Gateway communities are encouraged to develop quality, sustainable projects that support the integrity of place.

Project Timeline – Applicants should develop a project that can be successfully implemented within a 12-month time frame. (A three-month project extension can be granted for unique circumstances.) Projects selected for funding will be announced by September 2009. It will likely take four weeks for ARC to execute a contract with the selected grantees. Any activities or expenses incurred prior to a contract signed by ARC cannot be reimbursed.

ARC Gems of Appalachia Initiative - **Grant Application**

Please use ARC Cover Page – see below.

Please answer the following questions in no more than five (5) pages.

1. Project Purpose & Description
a) State the main purpose of the project in terms of the goal and strategy being addressed.
b) Describe the specific opportunities or issues the project will address.
c) Provide a detailed description of the project's activities, including:
  o action steps
  o who will complete each activity
  o timeline for starting and ending the project
d) Illustrate local demand for the project (e.g. letters from key stakeholders, newspaper articles).

2. Relation to other Local/Regional Activities
Describe how the project will be coordinated and leveraged with other Parkway 75 activities or other area events or priorities.

3. Project Benefits
What are the long-term measurable outcomes of the project? Use specific values to describe the project's outcomes that can be measured and tracked once the project is complete (e.g., "Draw 100 visitors to our new Thursday Nights on Main Street events, and increase sales at local businesses by 5 percent"). In addition, describe how will this project make a difference in the community?

How do you plan to evaluate the success of the project?

4. Applicant's Capacity
Describe the applicant's experience with implementing similar projects. What was the result of these projects?

5. Detailed budget and budget narrative
Provide a detailed budget that includes sources and uses of ARC grant funds **and** all matching or in-kind funds. **The budget must clearly show a 20 percent cash or in-kind match by the applicant.** Provide a budget narrative that explains all expenditures.

6. Letters of commitment
Include letters citing the specific amount of funds committed from all matching fund sources. Provide descriptions of specific in-kind resources including the methods used to determine their value. Commitment letters are not counted toward the application's 5-page limit.

7. Other Supporting Materials
Enclose pertinent supporting materials that will lead to a better understanding of the proposed project. Please limit brochures and visitor guides to a minimum of two per application, and include only if necessary to explain the project. Applications and supporting materials will not be returned.

Submit five (5) hard copies of your application and supporting materials to:

Molly Theobald, Program Operations Division
Attn: Blue Ridge Parkway 75
 Appalachian Regional Commission
1666 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20009

Please direct any questions to: mtheobald@arc.gov

Phone: 202/884-7767
Fax: 202/884-7682

Applications must be received by ARC before COB on Friday, June 26th, 2009.

Cover Page
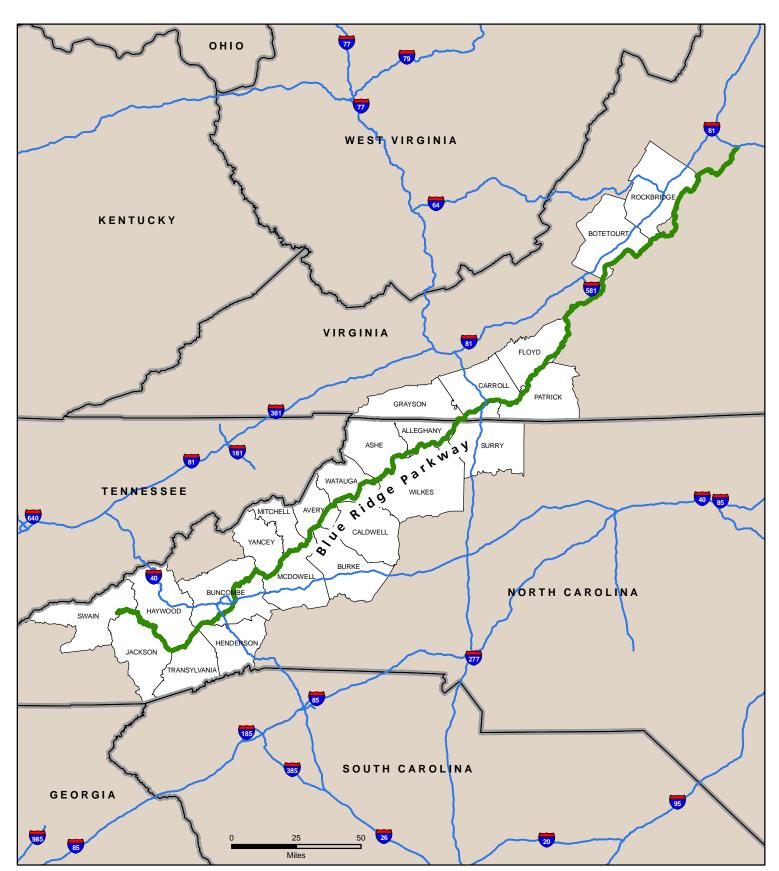**Gems of Appalachia: Enhancing Appalachia's Gateways to the Blue Ridge Parkway**

June, 2009

Please fill out the information below and attach to the front of your application:

1. Project Title:

2. Organization/Applicant:

3. Primary Contact:

4. Address:

5. Email:

6. Phone:

7. Fax:

8. County / City served:

9. Grant Request $ Amount:

Blue Ridge Parkway

23 Adjacent ARC Counties

OHIO

WEST VIRGINIA

KENTUCKY

VIRGINIA

ROCKBRIDGE

BOTETOURT

FLOYD

CARROLL

PATRICK

GRAYSON

ALLEGHANY

SURRY

ASHE

TENNESSEE

WATAUGA

WILKES

MITCHELL

AVERY

YANCEY

CALDWELL

Blue Ridge Parkway

BURKE

MCDOWELL

BUNCOMBE

NORTH CAROLINA

SWAIN

HAYWOOD

JACKSON

HENDERSON

TRANSYLVANIA

SOUTH CAROLINA

GEORGIA

Miles

0   25   50

Blue Ridge Parkway
23 Adjacent ARC Counties

FIPS	STATE	COUNTY
37005	North Carolina	Alleghany
37009	North Carolina	Ashe
37011	North Carolina	Avery
37021	North Carolina	Buncombe
37023	North Carolina	Burke
37027	North Carolina	Caldwell
37087	North Carolina	Haywood
37089	North Carolina	Henderson
37099	North Carolina	Jackson
37111	North Carolina	McDowell
37121	North Carolina	Mitchell
37171	North Carolina	Surry
37173	North Carolina	Swain
37175	North Carolina	Transylvania
37189	North Carolina	Watauga
37193	North Carolina	Wilkes
37199	North Carolina	Yancey
51023	Virginia	Botetourt
51035	Virginia	Carroll + Galax city
51063	Virginia	Floyd
51077	Virginia	Grayson
51141	Virginia	Patrick
51163	Virginia	Rockbridge + Buena Vista city + Lexington city